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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGEORGE BUNDY
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Sale of Minesweepers to Mexico

Early in 1961 the Government of Mexico expressed interest in purchasing a number of American minesweepers which had been declared surplus by the Department of the Navy. This interest caused considerable concern in American shrimp fishing circles owing to the continuing shrimp vessel seizure problem with Mexico. Mexico claims nine miles of territorial sea; the United States recognizes but three. The consequences of this controversy have been repeated molestation of American shrimp boats operating outside of three miles off the coast of Mexico in the Gulf of Mexico, including their seizure and the imposition of fines for alleged illegal fishing in Mexican waters (there have been well over 100 such seizures since 1950). It was feared that the acquisition by Mexico of an additional patrol fleet would serve to heighten Mexican enforcement activity against the American shrimp fleet.

It was realized that it would be difficult for the United States to refuse to sell to Mexico since such vessels had been declared available for purchase by any member of the free world. However, we wanted to be satisfied that the vessels would be used only for naval purposes and not for patrol intended to hurt American fishing activities considered legitimate by the United States Government. Consequently, in discussions between the Department and the Mexican Embassy it was made clear that we would have difficulty considering the request unless the vessels would be used only for naval purposes. The Mexican Ambassador said he understood this problem and that the ships would not be used for patrol activities against shrimp boats.

The Caribbean Defense Command and the Department of the Navy recommended the sale on military grounds to improve Mexico's patrol and minesweeping capabilities.

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After thorough consideration, including consultation with the United States Embassy at Mexico City, and Mexican stipulation of the naval purposes for which the vessels would be used (not including fishery patrol) it was decided to approve the sale of the twenty minesweepers, provided:

"... that Embassy Mexico City should make a clear oral statement to the Mexican Foreign Office at the time the Mexican Government is informed of our willingness to make this sale ... that the United States Government is not placing conditions on the sale, but wants the Mexican Government to understand that it would be a source of embarrassment in the relations between the two governments should any of the vessels concerned be used to seize United States shrimp boats outside a three mile limit from the Coast of Mexico."

The current furor regarding the transaction is attributable to a UPI story of November 24, 1962 from Tampico quoting an unnamed Mexican naval officer to the effect that the minesweepers were to be used against "pirate shrimp boats from Texas". Upon learning of this press story on November 28 the Department discussed it with the Mexican Ambassador. The Ambassador later informed the Department that he and the naval commander at Tampico had been authorized by the Foreign Minister and the Naval Minister to state that any such statement by a Mexican naval officer was unauthorized and that the minesweepers would be used by Mexico solely for naval purposes.

The Department has no information indicating that the Mexican Government has any plans for the vessels in question other than those naval purposes stipulated by the Mexican Government.

/s/ Howard Furnas

~~/s/ Howard Furnas~~

William H. Brubeck
Executive Secretary

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